

## Book of Revelation: Introductory Issues

### A. Canon History and Authority:

1. Immediate controversy: Rev. 22:18-19

2. Acceptance into the NT Canon:

a. Second Century AD:

b. Third to Fifth Century:

c. Reformation Period:

d. Modern Period:

*Among the books which are not genuine must be reckoned...the Apocalypse of Peter...and in addition, as I said, the Revelation of John, if this view prevail. For, as I said, some reject it, but others count it among the recognized books. Eusebius*

### B. Authorship: Who wrote the Book of Revelation?

1. Internal evidence:

2. External evidence:

*It is obvious that those who observe their character throughout will see at a glance that the Gospel and Epistle have one and the same complexion. But the Apocalypse is utterly different from, and foreign to, these writings; it has no connexion, no affinity, in any way with them; it scarcely, so to speak, has even a syllable in common with them.*

**Dionysius of Alex.** (†264)

**C. Date of Writing:** *“For [John’s apocalyptic vision] was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.” Irenaeus, Adv. Her. 5.30.3*

### D. Literary Styles in Revelation:

1. Revelation as a **Letter**:

**John,**  
*to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace to you and peace from...*  
(Rev. 1:4; cf. 1:11; 2:1ff.; 22:21)

2. Revelation as **Prophecy**: *“Thus says the Son of God...Let everyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”* (Rev. 2:18, etc.)

- Biblical prophecy is more about seeing *behind* the present than seeing *into* the future.

3. Revelation as **Apocalypse**: *“After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’”* (Rev. 4:1)

**a. The structure of apocalyptic:** Cyclical versus Linear. Apocalyptic literature rarely follows a linear scheme of development, in which events unfold in a logical progression. More often, the pattern is cyclical, with the same events often described more than once, but from different perspectives or with gradual intensity:

- *Examples:* Final Wrath: Rev. 6:16, 11:18, 14:19, 19:15. Compare 1:4 with 11:17.

**b. Use of symbolic language:** In understanding the visionary imagery of apocalyptic, it is important to recognize that the picture symbols of Revelation communicate fundamental spiritual truths and that the pictures themselves are not meant to be taken as literal descriptions. A vision is not a photograph of reality and John is not a reporter cataloguing facts about heaven, angels or demons. Just because something is seen in a vision does not make it a physical reality in time and space, outside the context of the vision (e.g. Joseph in Genesis, Peter in Acts). The imagery of the vision needs to be translated from symbol to substance, from medium to message (e.g. Temple in Rev. 3:12//21:22; bowls of incense in 5:8).

As Eugene Peterson has noted: “There is not a line here that is not rigorously theological. But, ‘because we have an unhealthy curiosity, a deficient comprehension, because we are always attracted by the spectacular and the emotional, in the apocalypse we generally become interested in what is only an envelope.’” (*Reversed Thunder*, 187).

### Conventional apocalyptic symbols:

- **Colors:** The use of various colors in apocalyptic literature does not so much relate to color or hue as it does to quality or condition. So in Rev. 19:8 the *white robes* of the saints (cf. 6:11) are said to “stand for” (i.e. symbolize) their *righteous deeds*. It is beyond John’s purpose to imply that Christians will literally wear white robes in heaven. Other examples:
- **Animals:** The use of animal imagery in apocalyptic literature is very common and is usually representative of character qualities, either good or bad. So in Revelation, the *Lamb* versus the *Beast* is an intentional contrast between a figure of meekness and sacrifice and one of arrogant power and oppression. Other examples:
- **N\_\_\_\_\_:** In apocalyptic descriptions, numbers rarely express a literal time frame or mathematical equivalent, but more often designate a relative or general duration, or symbolize a quality or idea associated with the number. For example, *seven* is the number of fullness or completeness, *four* is the number of nature or creation, and *twelve* represents the people of God or its leaders. Other examples:
- **T\_\_\_\_\_ apocalyptic or prophetic symbols:** Because Revelation stands chronologically towards the end of the period of apocalyptic literature which began centuries earlier, John adopts many symbols which have become in the genre conventional for expressing certain ideas. Also, because John sees himself as a prophet in the tradition of OT prophecy, he reuses traditional prophetic symbols, metaphors and poetic hyperbole to express and illustrate his own visions. Some conventional symbols are a *Woman* representing a people or city, *Crowns* symbolizing dominion or kingship, *Trumpets* denoting voices. Other examples:

Horns = \_\_\_\_\_, Stars = \_\_\_\_\_, Eyes = \_\_\_\_\_.

“They [the Romans under Hadrian] slew the inhabitants [of Betar, after Bar-Kosiba, its defender, had been killed] until the horses waded in blood up to the nostrils, and the blood rolled along stones of the size of forty se’ah and flowed into the sea a distance of four miles.” (*Lamentations Rabbah* 2:2:4) Compare Rev. 14:20; 1 *Enoch* 100:3

### Examples of Symbolism in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses

**1 Enoch (2<sup>nd</sup> C. B.C.):** Then I kept seeing till one great horn sprouted on one of those sheep, and he opened their eyes...and all the rams saw him and ran unto him....All the eagles, vultures, ravens, and kites gathered, with all the sheep of the field lining up with them...all of them cooperated in order to smash the horn of the ram. I saw that man who was writing a book by the command of the Lord, for he opened that book of the destruction which those twelve last shepherds caused...Then I kept seeing till a throne was erected in a pleasant land; and he sat upon it for the Lord of the sheep...then the Lord called those people, the seven first snow-white ones, and ordered them to bring before him some from among the first stars that arose. (*“Animal Apocalypse”, 90:9-21*)

**Fourth Book of Ezra (1<sup>st</sup> C. A.D.):** After this I looked, and behold, an innumerable multitude of men were gathered together from the four winds of heaven to make war against the man who came up out of the sea. And I looked, and behold, he carved out for himself a great mountain, and flew up upon it. And I tried to see the region or place from which the mountain was carved, but I could not.

After this I looked, and behold, all who gathered together against him, to wage war with him, were much afraid, yet dared to fight. And behold. When he saw the onrush of the approaching multitude, he neither lifted his hand nor held a spear or any weapon of war; but I saw only how he sent forth from his mouth as it were a stream of fire, and from his lips a flaming breath, and from his tongue he shot forth a stream of sparks. (*The Sixth Vision: The Man from the Sea, 13:5-10*)

**Sibylline Oracles (1-2 C. A.D.):** Then will come a certain great destroyer of pious men, who will show a clear initial of seven times ten. His son, with a first initial of three hundred, will...take away his power. After him will be a commander, with an initial of four, a cursed man, but then a revered man of the number fifty...[and] a great star will come from heaven to the wondrous sea and will burn the deep sea and Babylon itself and the land of Italy, because of which many holy faithful Hebrews and a true people perished. (5:36-41; 158-161)



## 2. The Biblical Story as a Grand Narrative:

- **Act I: Creation** (Gen. 1-2): *“It is very good”*; Humans as the *“image”* of God
- **Act II: The “Fall”** (Gen. 3-11): *The universal effects of alienation from the Creator*
- **Act III: Redemption:** *Universal reconciliation for the whole Creation*
  1. The story of Israel: *Your seed will bless the nations*; A *“kingdom of priests”* (**Exod. 19:4-6**)
  2. The story of Jesus: *“If anyone is in Christ – new creation!”* (**2 Cor.5:17**)
    - Incarnation, Life and Teachings: *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (**John 1:14**)
    - Death, Resurrection and Ascension: *I was dead...I am alive forever...I have the keys of death and Hades* (**Rev. 1:18**)
  3. The story of the Church: *“On this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prove stronger than it”* (**Matt. 16:18**); *You will be my witnesses* (**Acts 1:8**)
- **Act IV: Renewal**
  1. The resurrection of the dead: *“We wait eagerly for...the redemption of our bodies”* (**Rom. 8:23**)
  2. The renewal of God’s creation: *Creation liberated from its bondage to decay* (**Rom.8:21**)
  3. Eternity in God’s presence in the new creation: *“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on earth”* (**Rev. 5:10**)

*I am the Alpha and Omega, the  
First and the Last,  
the Beginning and the End.  
Rev. 22:13*

## 3. John’s use of OT terminology and traditions:

**a. Dramatis Personae:** Balaam, Balak, Jezebel, David, the Prophets, Moses, Elijah, Michael, the Lamb, the Serpent/Dragon/Satan, the Messiah, the Beast, the False Prophet, the Harlot, the Bride, Gog and Magog, four living creatures, the four horsemen, Abaddon/Apollyon, various angels, etc.

**b. Israelite Institutions:** the Temple and its cultic accessories, for example, the priesthood, altar of sacrifice, golden altar of incense, horns of the altar, ark of the covenant, the outer court, the tabernacle of testimony, the commandments of God, the twelve tribes (specified) and the tribe of Judah.

**c. Holy and Mythic Geography:** Paradise, Mount Zion, the abyss, Hades, the lake of fire, Babylon, New Jerusalem, Sodom, Egypt, the wilderness, the Euphrates, Har-Mageddon, the river of life, and the tree of life.

**d. Religious Vocabulary and Concepts:** sons of Israel, song of Moses, manna, Day of the Lord, the book of life, OT numerology and gematria, the shekinah glory of God, cosmic manifestations of theophany, divine wrath, holy war traditions, a new song, firstfruits, root of David, etc.

**e. Miscellaneous religious and cultural props:** scrolls, seals, trumpets, lampstands, palm branches, white robes, golden sashes, purple and scarlet clothing, sackcloth, incense, smoke, fire, sulfur, eagles, bowls, locusts, frogs, a white horse, thrones, crowns, rainbows, precious stones, measuring rod, thunder, lightning, hail, stars, a bow, swords, harps, a sharp sickle, ripe grapes, a winepress and winecup, a millstone

The Revelation has 404 verses. In those 404 verses, there are 518 references to earlier scripture. If we are not familiar with the preceding writings, quite obviously we are not going to understand the Revelation. St. John has his favorite books of scripture: Ezekiel, Daniel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Isaiah, Exodus...The statistics post a warning: no one has any business reading the last book who has not read the previous sixty-five. It makes no more sense to read the last book of the Bible apart from the entire scriptures than it does to read the last chapter of any novel, skipping everything before it...St. John did not make up his visions of dragons, beasts, harlots, plagues, and horsemen out of his own imagination; the Spirit gave him the images out of the scriptures that he knew so well; then he saw their significance in a fresh way. Every line of the Revelation is mined out of the rich strata of Scripture laid down in the earlier ages.

**Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 23**

## Revelation and Creation Theology

**Old Testament Foundation:** Then God said, "Let us make humankind [*adam*] **in our image**, in our likeness, and let them **rule over** the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ... Then God said, "I give you every **seed-bearing plant** on the face of the whole earth and **every tree that has fruit** with seed in it. They will be yours for **food**. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground - everything that has the breath of life in it - I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, **and it was very good**.

Gen. 1:26-31

**Effects of the Fall and Curse:** Alienation between Humankind and God, between Man and Woman, between Humankind and Creation (both animate and nonanimate)

**OT Accountability Statements: Covenant with Noah:** God... [said] "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon the fish of the sea; **they are given into your hands**. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. **I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.** Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; *for in his image did God make man...*

"I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you - the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals...**every living creature on earth**...Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and **all living creatures** of every kind on the earth. **Gen. 9:1-17**

**Stewardship of God's land, flora and fauna:**

- *The land must not be sold permanently, because **the land is mine** and you are but strangers and my tenants.* **Lev. 25:23**
- *For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and **the wild animals** may eat what they leave.* **Exod. 23:10-11**
- *When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, **do not destroy its trees** by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees of the field men, that you should besiege them?* **Deut. 20:19**
- *The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.* **Psalms 24:1** (compare Ps.8)

### Revelation's Vision of God and Creation

**The Ideal of the Throne-room Vision:**

- The four living creatures (4:6-7):
- God as Creator of all things (4:11):
- Every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea praise God (5:13-14):

**The Restoration of God's Ideal on Earth (Rev. 21-22 // Genesis 1-3 *redux*):**

- River of life (22:1):
- Tree of life (22:2):
- No more curse (22:3):
- No more death, crying or pain (21:4):

### Revelation's prophetic critique of human warfare and violence

**A. The effect of war on humankind: The six seals (Rev. 6:1-17):**

1. The rider on the white horse with the bow:
2. The rider on the fiery red horse with the sword:
3. The rider on the black horse with scales:
4. The rider on the pale horse:

#### Summary of the 4 Horsemen

They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and disease, and by the wild beasts of the earth. **Rev. 6:8**

**Accountability Statement:** "Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her [*Babylon*] for the way she treated you...In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of **all** who have been killed on the earth." **Rev. 18:20, 24; cp. Jer. 51:48-49**

## B. The effect on God's Creation: The seven trumpets (Rev. 8-9):

"I hear the sound of the trumpet,  
the alarm of war" Jer. 4:19b



### Genesis Creation Story

**Day Three:** Let the **earth** produce vegetation:  
seed-bearing plants...**trees** that bear fruit ...  
[LXX **grass**]...and God saw that it was good.

**Day Five:** Let the waters teem with living creatures...  
So God created the great **creatures of the sea**...  
and God saw that it was good.

**Day Three:** Let the water under the sky be gathered  
to one place...and the gathered waters he called  
"seas." And God saw that it was good.

**Day Four:** Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky:  
**sun, moon** and **stars**...And God saw that it was good.

### Trumpet Judgments (Rev. 8:6-11:19)

**First:** Hail and fire, mixed with blood – on the **earth**  
Third of earth, **trees** and **grass** burned up

**Second:** Blazing mountain into the **sea**; **third of**  
**sea to blood**, third of **sea creatures**

**Third:** Blazing Star falls on third of **rivers**  
Third of waters bitter, many people die

**Fourth:** Third of **sun, moon** and **stars** turned dark  
Third of day and night without light

**Accountability Statement:** "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty...because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead...and for destroying those who destroy the earth." Rev. 11:18; cp.9:1; Jer. 51:25

## C. Josephus' Jewish War Parallels to Revelation

1. In speaking of the various nations subject to Roman power and influence, Josephus writes: "they are overawed by the might of Rome and by her fortune, [the latter] which wins her even more victories than do her arms." (2.16.373)

Who is like the beast  
and who can war  
against it? Rev. 13:4

2. In the Roman armies advance on Jerusalem through the Jordan valley, Josephus says: "The non-combatants were slaughtered wholesale, the able-bodied fled, and the soldiers ransacked the houses, setting the village on fire...not only was the whole countryside through which they fled one long trail of slaughter and the Jordan [River] choked with corpses, and the Dead Sea also was filled with dead bodies which the river carried down into in masses." (4.7.436-7)

3. On the siege of Jotapata: "The wooded heights around the town were stripped of their trees, and along with the timber, an enormous mass of stones was piled up." (3.7.162)

### 4. In the siege of Jerusalem:

- "Every fence and barrier that the inhabitants had erected around their gardens and orchards was swept away, every fruit tree within the area pulled up. Every dip and hollow filled; the rocky projections were demolished with iron implements, and the whole space leveled..." (5.3.107)
- "It was difficult to secure timber, for all the trees around the city had been cut down for the previous works, and the troops had to collect fresh material from a distance of ninety furlongs" [about 8 miles] (5.13.523)
- "The Romans...though struggling terribly in collecting the timber, managed to raise their earthworks in twenty-one days...having stripped the whole area around the town to a distance of 9 miles. The countryside, like the city, was a pitiful sight, for where once there had been a multitude of trees and parks, there was now an utter wilderness stripped bare of timber; and no stranger who had seen the old Judaea and the glorious suburbs of her capital, and now beheld utter desolation, could refrain from tears or suppress a groan at so terrible a change. The war had blotted out every trace of beauty..." (6.1.5-8)

*Everywhere there are persons and groups bent on destroying a good creation: killing and mutilating living beings, exploiting a bountiful earth, crippling and weakening precious bodies. The world as we observe it is shot through with evil. The evil is summarized in the three horsemen of war (red horse), famine (black horse), and sickness unto death (pale horse)...Each of these evils is common, but each is also disguised so that we culturally accept its presence as something normal, even good. War is disguised as patriotism and a glorious struggle for freedom. Famine is disguised as a higher standard of living. Sickness is disguised by technology. Evil introduces, by turns, conflict, greed, and deceit into social and personal existence and undoes creation, subverting its purpose and contradicting its design of redemption. These evils present such a benign appearance in their disguises that the world unthinkingly accepts them as the forces of history, to which Christ is a lovely but essentially ineffective minority protest.*

Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 76-77

# First Century Numerology

1. Letters as numbers: Hebrew:  $\alpha = 1, \beth = 2, \text{m} = 40, \text{sh} = 300$

Greek:  $\alpha = 1, \beta = 2, \nu = 50, \sigma = 200$

• **Examples:**

$\Delta = 4$	$\tau = 4$	$M = 40$	$I = 10$
$\alpha = 1$	$\iota = 6$	$I = 10$	$\eta = 8$
$u = 400$	<u><math>\tau = 4</math></u>	$X = 600$	$\sigma = 200$
$\iota = 10$	$14$	$\alpha = 1$	$o = 70$
<u><math>\delta = 4</math></u>		$\eta = 8$	$u = 400$
$419$		<u><math>\lambda = 30</math></u>	<u><math>\zeta = 200</math></u>
		$689$	$888$

*Pompei Graffito*

I LOVE HER WHOSE  
NAME IS 545



a = 1
b = 2
g = 3
d = 4
e = 5
z = 7
th = 9
i = 10
k = 20
l = 30
m = 40
n = 50
o = 70
p = 80
r = 100
s = 200
t = 300
u = 400
ph = 500

My Name?

*Count the numerical values  
of the letters in Nero's name,  
and in 'murdered his own mother'  
you will find their sum is the same.*

**Suetonius**

## 2. Identification of the number of the Beast - 666:

- **Clue one:** The *Beast* is a King/Emperor (Rev. 17:3, 9-10)
- **Clue two:** His name adds up to 666 (Rev.13:18)

Some Greek manuscripts have 616 which represents the Latin form of Nero minus the *n* (Hebrew nun)

Ne	$\nu = 50$	$\theta = \text{t}$
r	$\rho = 200$	$\eta$
o	$\iota = 6$	$\rho = \gamma$
n	$\iota = 50$	$\iota = \text{'}$
		$o = \text{I}$
Kai	$\kappa = 100$	<u><math>\nu = \text{I}</math></u>
sa	$o = 60$	<i>Beast</i>
<u>r</u>	<u><math>\rho = 200</math></u>	
	$666$	

"Glorious Rome shall bound her empire with earth, her pride by heaven, and with a single city's wall shall enclose her seven hills" (Virgil, c. 40 B.C.)  
 "Sing the hymn in honor of the gods who love the Seven Hills...never may you be able to view anything greater than the city of Rome!" (Horace, c. 35 BC)  
 "The city high-throned on the seven hills, the queen of all the world ... Rome take thy triumph" (Propertius, c. 20 B.C.)  
 "Rome, that gazes about from her seven hills upon the whole world, - Rome, the place of empire and the gods" (Ovid, c. 12 B.C.)

In my travels...I have seen many, many wild *beasts* of Arabia and India; but this *beast* ( $\theta\eta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ ), that is commonly called a tyrant, I know not how many heads it has...and of wild beasts you cannot say that they were ever known to eat their own mothers, but Nero has gorged himself on this diet. **Apollonius of Tyana (60's AD)**

## The Bride-New Jerusalem: Revelation 21:1-22:5

**Interpretive question:** Is the New Jerusalem, the *Bride*, the wife of the Lamb (21:9), a physical city or a spiritual people?

### 1. **Preparation of the Bride: 19:7-9**

Q. Why is this announcement placed before the Parousia of Christ?

*I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 2 Cor. 11:2*  
Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with washing of water by the word. **Eph. 5:25-26**

### 2. **Entrance of the Bride: 21:1-8**

a. *OT influence:* compare Rev.21:1-4 and Isaiah 65:16-20a

b. *Marriage symbolism:* compare esp. the formula in 21:3 with Near Eastern marriage contracts: “She is my wife and I her husband from this day forever.” Cf. Jer.31:33; Hos.2:23; Eph.5:25-27; 2 Cor.11:2

\* Note that believer’s are already referred to as God’s beloved city in Rev.20:9, and in 22:14-15 John implies that one can enter into or be excluded from the city even *now* (cf. Heb.12:22-23).

### 3. **Description of the Bride: 21:9-22:5**

a. *Architectural traditions:* 21:9-21

- Precious building materials: 1 Chron.28:2-9; 2 Chron. 3:6-7

*Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city...I am about to set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphire. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of jewels, and all your wall of precious stones. Isa. 52:1; 54:11-12*

b. *The city as a temple:* 21:22-22:5

- “I did not see a temple in the city...” (21:22)

In both of these sections virtually every allusion is based on OT prophecies relating to eschatological Jerusalem and its future glory, sanctity and exalted position, especially Ezekiel 40-48; Isa.52:1; 54:11-12; 60; and Zech.14.

Nuptial imagery is at the heart of John’s evocation of the New Jerusalem. And as is typical of weddings, the bride occupies the center of attention. The visionary drama of the bride unfolds in three progressive stages of development. Rev. 19:7-9 shows the planning and final preparations stage: a formal wedding announcement is given; the marriage supper is arranged; the guest list finalized. The ceremony is about to begin, for the bride ‘has prepared herself’ and awaits her entrance. Her moment of glory arrives in 21:2 where she descends as the New Jerusalem ‘prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’. This debut is immediately followed in 21:3 by a reciprocal covenant promise which is ultimately patterned after Near Eastern marriage contracts: ‘and they shall be his people[s], and God himself shall be with them [and be their God]’. The third and final stage of the bride theme comes in 21:18-21, where the description of her adornment, anticipated in 21:2,9 is finally presented. All three units 19:7-9, 21:2 and 21:18-21 are linked to each other by connecting words: prepared (19:7) → prepared / adorned (21:2) → adorned (21:19).

**J. Fekkes, Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions, 247-48**